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**SOME ASPECTS OF CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND
DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF SOVIET EXPERIENCE
IN ITS IMPLEMENTATION**

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The forward march of mankind finds its uppermost expression in the progress of human culture. The process whereby a historical epoch succeeds another goes side-by-side with a replacement of a certain type of culture by another, more progressive one.

An important historical landmark was the replacement of Medieval culture by the bourgeois culture of modern times. This was an inevitable and legitimate step-forward on the road of social development. But no less legitimate was the birth, in the present-day epoch, of new, socialist culture which succeeds bourgeois culture, altogether stripped of its formerly progressive thrust.

But the nature and essence of the socialist renovation of spiritual life differs basically from all changes that occurred there in the past, as one social formation replaced another, including the change-over from feudalism to capitalism. This renovation, which affects tangibly the foundations of the entire system of spiritual production, bears so radical a character that it was aptly dubbed by V. I. Lenin as «cultural revolution». We fail to trace the term in Marx and Engels although they gave a science-based interpretation of the concept, in essence.

The theory of cultural revolution has emerged and developed as an organic component of the Marxist-Leninist teaching about the socialist remaking of society. The epoch-making historical objective of the revolution consists in converting culture «from an instrument of capitalism into an instrument of socialism»¹, in the replacement of bourgeois culture by socialist one. This foremost purpose of cultural revolution determines all the distinctions and the exceptional role allocated to it in the spiritual progress of humanity.

Below, we spotlight some of its essential features.

In the first place, socialism and all-pervading national spirit are inseparable throughout. Socialist culture is born as a truly national culture. This constitutes the revolution-

nary essence of the cultural, reformatory and constructive process of transition from capitalism to socialism. Changes in spiritual life, such as took place in the pre-socialist epochs, no matter how progressive, clearly pointed to the indifference of the ruling classes toward the cultural growth of the masses of working people and their creative role. As Karl Marx, following in the wake of Utopian socialists, stressed, «Hitherto, any spiritual progress was achieved to the detriment of the masses of men who appeared to be in an increasingly inhumane situation». ² Antagonistic division of labour, which under capitalism assumes an outrageous form of opposition between intellectual and physical labour, led to the alienation from culture of the mass of exploited and toiling people. And as long as the exploitation system exists, no mass media would be capable of bridging the gap that separates the people and culture, of «homogenizing» the former, as some bourgeois authors, contrary to all factual evidence, maintain nowadays.

To convert all the gains of cultural into an all-people's possession — that is the historic mission of the proletarian revolution and socialism. Says V. I. Lenin to this effect: «In the old days, human genius, the brain of man, created only to give some the benefits of technology and culture and to deprive others of the bare necessity, education and development. From now on, all the marvels of science and the gains of culture belong to the nation as a whole, and never again will man's brain and human genius be used for oppression and exploitation». ³

Consolidation of popular culture means not only mass involvement in the progress of culture, together with the all-out education of the masses and unheard-of intellectual and spiritual upsurge, but it also means the conversion of the popular masses into an active and conscientious subject of cultural creation.

As is known, the apologists of bourgeoisie, in an attempt to justify the alienation of the masses from spiritual production, conjured up a variety of theories as to the «non-creative mass» as being opposed to the «creative elite». Holding forth on the «cultural obtuseness» of the masses, they point to their having no «lofty spiritual requirements» but forget altogether that art alone can breed esthetic feelings, that cultural requirements can come about

from nowhere else than culture. The masses, debarred as they may be from cultural production, take no interest in its development and have no concern whatever about its destiny. Whenever the masses come to think of the fortunes of culture, it is only because they grow increasingly aware of the need for a change in the social conditions so as to enable free development of culture.

All the apologetic «theories» of bourgeois ideologists were not only disproved long ago by the theory of Marxism-Leninism, but also debunked by the experience of cultural construction in the USSR and other socialist countries, where it is energized by the intellect and vigour of the popular masses and is a result of their historic creation.

One of the essentials of cultural revolution involves wiping out cultural inequality between different social groups and entities, between the component parts of the population through cultural integration of society.

In the epoch of capitalism mankind made a tremendous step forward toward the unification of spiritual life. However, «the corporative spirit» in the propagation of culture has persisted and makes itself felt throughout. Historical experience has shown that socialism alone can do away with it, once and for all, as the socialist revolution in culture not only erases the cultural opposition between the haves and have-nots, but assists in overcoming the cultural inequality of the female section of society, the backwardness of rural population aptly dubbed by Marx as the idiocy of rural life, a gap between the cultural standards of nations; and, finally, major steps are being made to bridge the gap between intellectual and physical labour.

Socialism, by abolishing all social and national privileges and inequalities in cultural life, by liberating human personality from «the power of the thing», affirms genuine humanism, opens wide alleys for the blossoming of human personality. Socialist culture arises as an embodiment of real humanism in spiritual life.

One other essential feature of cultural revolution is the formation of new intelligentsia.

The fact that socialist construction tremendously up of boosts the cultural and educational standards of the working people does not rule out the need for building up numerous cohorts of new intelligentsia. Socialism, like no

other social system, needs intelligentsia, large numbers of educated commanding cadre capable of carrying through the economico-organizational, as well as cultural and educational objectives of the socialist state.

Construction of socialism, carried out in a well-planned and highly organized manner, on the basis of broad application of achievements of science, technology and culture, requires ever-increasing numbers of engineers, agronomists, economists, planners—in general, scientifically educated personnel.

The formation of socialist intelligentsia goes in two directions: re-education of old intelligentsia, inherited from the past, and raising of new cadre of intelligentsia from among the working class and peasantry. Depending on the country's cultural level inherited from the past, either trend may be predominant.

It is of special significance to pose and resolve in the course of cultural revolution the issue of reception—i. e. perception and assimilation by the socialist «cultural monad» of the spiritual values created either in the past or in a different but contemporary medium.

Throughout the entire history of human civilization cultural reception has provided an essential source of progress for the latter. Moreover, all major upheavals in the cultural development of individual nations were invariably caused by an extraordinary intensity and scale of reception.

Reception in culture, the same as in other fields, extends in two directions: «vertically», i. e. perception and assimilation of the heritage of the past times, and «horizontally», i. e. perception and assimilation of the values created in another (ethnical, national, social) contemporary medium. Each trend has some features and significance specifically its own.

In the culture of each class epoch of the past one can single out on the one hand, permanent all-human values and on the other hand, historically transient values, created by this or that exploiting class, holding a predominant position in politics or economy, and by its prevailing ideology.

The culture of each epoch, from the viewpoint of real achievements of science and art, of the tremendous gains of human genius, is yet another stage in historical pro-

gress. In order to rise to a new stage of cultural development, it is necessary to lean back on the achievements of the past. Frederick Engels said that «advancement in science is proportionate to the mass of knowledge inherited by this science from the preceding generation».⁴ This proposition of F. Engels is of prime importance as it applies to all spheres of spiritual life, to the whole of cultural progress.

Addressing himself to those positive gains which came about as a result of the entire course of the cultural growth of humanity, particularly in the epoch of capitalism, V. I. Lenin maintained repeatedly that «we must take the entire culture that capitalism left behind and build socialism with it. We must take all its science, technology, knowledge and art. Without these we shall be unable to build communist society».⁵

One cannot help taking heed of some distinctions of cultural heritage, which call for a thoughtful, careful attitude to this heritage. In the first place, it should be noted that the creators of great scientific discoveries and masterpieces of art as often as are not recognized by their contemporaries—this recognition would come to them with time, as a result of the general progress of mankind. This only happens because true geniuses are always ahead of the progress of history.

Said Carlo Rossi: «A palace is long-lived. But Iliad is a more lasting source of delight». Indeed, which of the material values produced in antique times continues in the service of modern man, as do the immortal works of Homer, or Sophocles, Aristotle or Democritus?! A distinction of spiritual values lies in their being more durable than material values. From this distinction of cultural values arises yet another wonderful property of these—they are never worn out through lasting use and, if not in originals then in reproductions, may exist «forever», thus servicing consumers in unlimited numbers... Let us note also the following property of the objects of spiritual consumption: spiritual food, in contrast to material one, never causes satiation in man. Of course, what is meant is not various kinds of surrogates, but real values which produce in man, as he gets familiar with them, some new requirements.

These properties of spiritual values add to the significance of continuity in cultural development.

As far as continuity is concerned, the Marxist-Leninist approach encounters two extremes: that of nihilism, and that brought about by a non-critical attitude toward the culture of the past.

Socialist culture arises and develops on the unshakable foundation of progressive cultural heritage, it assimilates and drives forward the best and most advanced tendencies emerging from world culture. But cultural heritage must be treated in a creative manner. V. I. Lenin said about Marxists that disciples «keep guardedly the heritage but not in the way archivists keep on old paper. To preserve the heritage by no means implies restricting oneself to that heritage alone».⁶

It is none other but socialist culture that assimilates, through continuity from the past time, only the advanced, all-human element and casts away everything reactionary, anti-national. This, again, distinguishes it basically from bourgeois culture which adopted willingly from the past such a reactionary inheritance as religion. Socialist revolution in culture brings about the latter's liberation from the domination of anti-scientific outlooks and reactionary exploiters' ideology; it combines culture with science-based materialist views and socialist ideology.

This is how things stand with «vertical» reception. No less important and essential for the cultural progress of socialism is an effective solution of the problem of «horizontal» reception. There are many facets to this complex problem which cannot possibly be worked out in all aspects within the limited space of a paper. I shall confine myself, therefore, to pointing out and generalizing some of its aspects.

Society is made up of a multitude of «cultural monads», i. e. units which differ in some historically formed peculiar features. In modern times, one such is, first of all, the nation.

Humanity, being an aggregate of «cultural monads», recalls a system of communicating vessels, as the achievements of each nation constantly communicate with those of other nations and thus become accessible to all. The mutual reception of contemporary nations provides a powerful motive impulse for the cultural progress of individual nations and the entire human society.

A nation progresses culturally by overcoming its inter-

nal contradictions, as well as those between its own achievements and those of other nations, by catching up with other, more advanced nations.

Socialism presupposes an all-sided relation and mutual perception of nations in the field of culture. Needless to say, the character, designation and tendencies of this mutual cultural reception differ by a large margin from international reception under capitalism — by a margin as large as the one that distinguishes socialist culture from bourgeois one.

«Horizontal» reception in conditions of cultural revolution is a far too embracing and complex problem. Its complexity is conditioned, above all, by the fact that, as cultural revolution wears on, socialist nations mutually perceive and assimilate one another's achievements, and also maintain a receptional kind of relationship with bourgeois nations and their bourgeois culture. Apparently, the problem at issue finds different solution in either case. While in the former case we speak of the perception and assimilation of the national element within the framework of relationships between essentially similar socialist nations, in the latter case we deal with a reception of values created in the national, but socially different, bourgeois, medium.

In the latter case, the special complexity of finding practical solutions to the problem of reception is caused by the necessity to delineate real achievements of modern bourgeois culture from its exploitative ideology. This is not an easy matter — due to the sophisticated methods whereby the bourgeoisie seeks to apply the achievements of science and culture to further its selfish class goals, on a par with genuine values, thus trying to pass off its own «ideological know-how» as a benefit.

Socialist culture develops as national in form and international in content. Its development law is through mutual influence and enrichment of national cultures.

Such are the essential features of cultural revolution as a general social development trend in the epoch of socialist renovation of society.

Cultural revolution, being one of the general forms in which socialism affirms itself, possesses some universal features which describe its nature in general. Nevertheless, under specific conditions of each particular country this

general nature shows itself in the form of specifically national reformative and constructive developments, while the universal features of cultural revolution are present in their national modifications.

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Soviet experience in the implementation of cultural revolution shows an unbreakable unity of the general and the particular in the laws governing this revolution. The cultural revolution in the USSR had its own specific features. At the same time, its foremost features are of a universal character and, therefore, the criterion of repeatability can be applied to them.

Cultural revolution in the USSR had several distinctions owing to a number of historic factors, both objective and subjective. Some of these were behind the overwhelming difficulties and hardships the dictatorship of the proletariat encountered in implementing its cultural goals, while others gave the Soviet country great advantages in the construction of new culture.

It must be stressed that the first socialist country had to overcome many hardships and heavy complexities, on its road toward cultural revolution.

Of the essential factors which caused numerous difficulties and complexities at the initial stage of the country's cultural remaking, three are worth mentioning as the most significant ones.

Firstly, the Soviet people, a front-runner in socialist construction, had to blaze the trail; nor could it draw upon the experience of other nations, but it pressed forward ploughing up the virgin lands of history.

The pioneering venture of building up socialist culture made the Soviet people embark upon the road of searches and experiments. Naturally many superfluous and quite a few erroneous things were bound to occur. Rather popular in those years was the «infantile disorder of 'leftism' in culture», the compulsion of those who contracted the disorder to substitute the new for the old at all costs, their passion for ultra-innovation. And these were unavoidable overhead costs of the «discovery» of socialist culture.

V. I. Lenin pointed out in 1921 that the overriding difficulties of the entire proletarian revolution in Russia

stemmed from the fact that we had to take upon ourselves the initiative in socialist revolution, and this initiative placed upon us and our country the hardships unheard-of and unseen hitherto.⁷ In particular, the USSR's pioneering role in the socialist renovation of the world doubled and trebled the resistance of the overthrown exploiting classes and all anti-national reactionary forces. Why, for example, in the early post-Revolutionary days was the old intelligentsia so unwilling to offer its services to the victorious people and took instead to actively sabotaging the Soviet power? In a large measure, it did so because there was not a single case on the records when uneducated workers and peasants ruled a state, and built a new culture into the bargain.

Secondly, the Soviet country inherited from the old Russia of bourgeoisie and landlords the latter's extreme technological, scientific and cultural backwardness, which placed an unbearable burden upon the shoulders of the people-creators of new culture. V. I. Lenin made the same point: «For us this cultural revolution presents immense difficulties of a purely cultural (for we are illiterate) and material character (for to be cultured we must achieve a certain development of the material means of production, we must have a certain material base)».⁸

To aggravate matters, the people of Russia by the time of the October Revolution had reached different stages of historic development, ranging from patriarchal and communal system to capitalist one. The majority of non-Russian peoples lingered at the stage of pre-capitalist backwardness. Differences in the rate of social and economic backwardness resulted in enormous disparity in the cultural standards of these peoples. While among comparatively more developed nations in Russia three fourths of the population were illiterate, dozens of backward nations did not have so much as a written language. So, it appeared that many peoples in the USSR were to make a leap from pre-bourgeois culture to socialist one.

In the course of the socialist cultural revolution effort had to be taken to resolve some «additional» objectives, such as national cultural renaissance of underdeveloped nations, eradications of their cultural inequality, etc.

The defeated bourgeoisie, from the cultural standpoint, was superior to those who had won political victory. This

controversy, a *sine-qua-non* of any socialist upheaval in general, was especially striking in Russia where masses of illiterate, backward workers and peasants were predominant. This determined the nature of struggle between the old, bourgeois culture and the rising socialist culture, which had the more violent and lasting character because it was far from easy to shatter the cultural stranglehold of those exploiting classes and their «cultural servants» than had been overthrown politically but still continued to exist.

The backwardness and essentially anti-democratic character of Russia's cultural heritage were responsible for the scarcity and anti-national leanings of the old intelligentsia. This led the Soviet power, besides winning over the old intelligentsia to take part in socialist construction, to press for the speedy development of intellectual cadre from among workers and peasants. The problem, however, could hardly be solved rapidly along the conventional lines through educational institutions. Therefore, in its earliest days the Soviet power applied such a revolutionary method as the promotion of workers and peasants to posts of «intellectual workers» and the conditioning of workers and peasants for higher education through «workers' training departments», etc.

The general demand of the socialist cultural revolution for the improvement of the educational and cultural standard of the people in conditions of the USSR found its early expression, first of all, in the nation-wide campaign for eradication of illiteracy, for elementary literacy of population, and, what is more, for development of written languages for dozens of peoples.

In the course of cultural revolution, in its early period, besides socialist tasks, the country had to attain, largely, general democratic objectives of cultural progress. As for material poverty, it equalled the country's cultural backwardness. The picture in the countryside was especially appalling. Peasants (i. e. 80 percent of the population) lived for centuries in the darkness — in the literal sense of the word. It was darkness that they sought to fight with light-furnishing splinters, the kerosene lamp regarded as a luxury even in the pre-revolutionary years of the 20th century, and had no notion whatever of electric lighting.

Speaking to the 8th All-Russian Congress of the

Soviets (December 1920), V. I. Lenin said: «You cannot emerge from this darkness very rapidly. What we must now try is to convert every electric power station we build into stronghold of enlightenment to be used to make the masses electricity-conscious, so to speak».⁹

Thirdly, the first country of socialism had to carry on with cultural construction for three decades under conditions of hostile capitalist environment. International reaction tried a «cultural blockade», to be followed by continual ideological diversions against the USSR, in an attempt to frustrate the construction of new Soviet culture. Penetration from abroad of bourgeois ideology and culture fostered the resistance of the exploiting elements within the country to the affirmation of new culture. They produced a baneful effect on the backward strata of the population by fanning up their conservatism in spiritual life.

The progress of the cultural revolution in the USSR encountered multiple other problems and hardships.

The nature and scope of some of them was so frightful that the enemies of the working class were provoked to make malicious prophesies of the imminent failure of the «Bolshevist experiment» in the field of culture, as well as in other spheres of social life, and hoped for Russia's impending recourse to the old order, for the «salvation» of her «perishing culture». Even many intellectuals, otherwise loyal to the workers' and peasants' republic, expressed concern about the destiny of its culture.

But life smashed to smithereens both the designs of reactionaries and the futile concerns of the intellectuals loyal to the proletarian state. In spite of all hardships and obstacles, our country reached a cultural upsurge unheard-of in the past.

Yet in Soviet reality there were not only factors hampering and retarding the country's cultural renovation but also those which made for the gigantic success of the cultural revolution. Of these, the most essential were the cultural awakening of the masses and the guidance of the Communist Party. Said Lenin in 1921 pointing to this historical fact: «There is a mighty urge for light and knowledge 'down below', that is to say, among the mass of working people whom capitalism... deprived of education. We can be proud that we are promoting and fostering this urge».¹⁰

The earliest steps of cultural development in conditions of proletarian dictatorship disproved fully in practice all «elitarian theories» of the ideologists of the exploiting classes. As soon as the working masses gained free access to culture, their cultural requirements began to grow apace while the Soviet social system aroused among these masses a keen interest in genuine culture. Naturally, the process of cultural awakening of the mass that had for centuries been downtrodden and miserable could not come out of the blue — it owed itself to the cultural, organizational and educational effort of the Party and state which, as no other state in history, advanced and accomplished with unheard-of momentum and consistency the tasks of cultural growth of the whole working population.

In one of his last works V. I. Lenin, while expressing confidence that the Soviet country would manage out of its obscure cultural state, remarked that nowhere else were popular masses so much interested in genuine culture, nor were the questions of culture posed so profoundly and consistently, as in Russia.¹¹

The profound and consistent approach to the questions of cultural development issued from no one but V. I. Lenin himself who understood better than anyone else the significance of their correct resolution for the fortunes of socialism in the USSR.

In one of Lenin's documents of 1922, when the country started peaceful construction drive, it is indicated that *economic and political* means will be sufficient for building up the *foundation* of socialist society. So, what was lacking? Culture and skill... The snag was therefore, a *gap* between the world-wide historic objectives that, posed and under way to implementation, and privation, material and cultural¹² and in his famous work «On Cooperation» V. I. Lenin said: «This cultural revolution would be sufficient to transform us into a completely Socialist country».¹³

He viewed these tasks as being intimately linked with economic and political problems of socialist construction. In the same work «On Cooperation» V. I. Lenin laid a special emphasis on the economic significance of cultural work among peasants as a prerequisite of cooperation. The inseparability of economic and cultural objectives was expressed in the Leninist formulas «production propaganda», «electric education», etc. The cultural revolution in

the USSR developed in organic unity and interrelation with the socialist industrialization of the country and collectivization of agriculture. In the same organic manner, cultural work among masses was intertwined with their political education. It is not an accident that the notion of «cultural and political education» is so deep-rooted in the minds of Soviet people. The cultural education of the population was never pictured by V. I. Lenin otherwise than in unison with the development of socialist democracy and the overcoming of such detrimental phenomena as red-tape, servility before rank and bribery.

Regarding the cultural objectives in close unity with the economic and political goals of socialism, V. I. Lenin, however, clearly perceived the former's specific distinctions. He took notice, in particular, of the fact that cultural objectives, due to their innermost character, must be settled step-by-step, over a much longer period of time than political or other objectives, that it was impermissible to try and solve them overnight. From the viewpoint of culture, only those things were really achieved which become part and parcel of day-to-day life and developed into a habit, V. I. Lenin reminded.

But a growth rate is a fairly relative notion. Cultural growth rates in the USSR were comparatively low compared with the pace of social, economic and political transformations in the country. However, if compared with the rate of cultural progress in prerevolutionary Russia or modern bourgeois states, they would appear to be extremely fast.

At this juncture it is worthwhile noting the following characteristic fact: in the USSR the rate of cultural advancement was faster in previously backward peoples. This is only natural under the socialist social system where friendly socialist nations tend to level in their development.

Culture provides an infinitely broad sphere of human endeavour encompassing all sides of spiritual life of society. The Soviet country, previously extremely backward in all spheres of life and further devastated by drawn-out wars, could not be equally active in its reformative and constructive work on the whole cultural front, in all directions of culture. In the early period of the cultural revolution emphasis was made on such vital tasks as the eradication

of illiteracy among masses and the latter's involvement in cultural life; protection and careful study of cultural heritage; involvement of the old intelligentsia coupled with the early attempt to build-up new cadre from among workers and peasants; bridging the gaps between nations; overcoming the backwardness of women and rural population.

In more recent years the Soviet country already had an opportunity to unfold on the broadest conceivable scale the historic creative effort in all spheres of spiritual production, to achieve the blossoming of socialist culture and science.

Implementation of the cultural revolution and creation of socialist, national culture is a great exploit of the Soviet people, one of the foremost achievements of socialism.

But the implementation of the cultural revolution, the same as the affirmation of socialism as a whole, is not only a Soviet achievement. It is also a world-wide historic feat which ushered in a new epoch of cultural progress for the whole humanity.

It was through Soviet socialist culture that, for the first time in history, there asserted itself a genuinely humanistic culture which lived up to the aspirations and hopes of the entire working mankind.

¹ V. I. Lenin, Coll. Works, vol. 27 p. 412.

² K. Marx, F. Engels, The Holy Family, p. 112.

³ V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 26, p. 479.

⁴ K. Marx, F. Engels, Selected Works, vol. 1, p. 366.

⁵ V. I. Lenin, Coll. Works, vol. 29, p. 83.

⁶ V. I. Lenin, Coll. Works, vol. 2, p. 542.

⁷ V. I. Lenin, Coll. Works, vol. 15, p. 225.

⁸ V. I. Lenin, Coll. Works, vol. 33, p. 475.

⁹ V. I. Lenin, Coll. Works, vol. 31, p. 517.

¹⁰ V. I. Lenin, Coll. Works, vol. 32, p. 127.

¹¹ V. I. Lenin, Coll. Works, vol. 33, pp. 462—465.

¹² V. I. Lenin, Coll. Works, vol. 33, p. 120.

¹³ V. I. Lenin, Selected Works, IX, p. 409.